

# Grounded and Abandoned Vessel in Coral Reef Ecosystems



A Presentation Update to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force

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San Juan, Puerto Rico

# Origin of Initiative

- Recent incidents highlighted gaps in legislative and funding framework.
- Draft US CRTF Resolution proposed investigation on:
  - I) Bonding requirement for fishing vessels
  - II) New legislation and funding in addition to OPA 90;
  - III) New legislation for coral reef damage assessment; and
  - IV) Federal assistance protocols to assist U.S. Flag islands.



# Major Actions

- Federal working group and white paper to examine current legislative and funding framework.
- Workshops in Hawaii and Guam to better understand the issue in all U.S. Flag Pacific.
- Developed the Abandoned Vessel Inventory.



# General Workshop Findings

- Two grounding categories:
  - 1) existing vessels, and
  - 2) future groundings.
- Reported groundings in the Pacific are infrequent, 1-3 per jurisdiction per year; however grounding impacts may be locally significant.
- Many groundings involve fishing vessels that lack ability to pay for insurance.





# General Workshop Findings

- Except for incident where OPA 90 applies, Jurisdictions generally lack the funding and legal authorities to address groundings.
- Habitat injuries and removal costs generally increase over time as the vessel degrades.
- Prevention activities are an opportunity to reduce the frequency of vessel groundings. Alternatives need to be more thoroughly explored.



# Response to Resolution I

## Bonding requirements for fishing vessels entering U.S. waters and ports adjacent to reefs

### ■ Response

- ◆ *Federal legislation that only targets fishing vessels transiting near coral reefs may be unconstitutional.*
- ◆ *This action may not apply to all vessels that are part of the problem.*

### ■ Opportunities

- ◆ *Jurisdictions could require local port/harbor agents to carry larger securities/bonds for their vessels in order to address possible damages from coral reef groundings.*

# Response to Resolution II

New legislation and funding in addition to OPA 90

## ■ Response

- ◆ *Given the magnitude of the problem, as currently understood, and the political support needed, new federal legislation that involves funding or liability is not a viable alternative at this time.*
- ◆ *Using existing authorities to the maximum extent possible and target existing funding is likely a more feasible alternative.*

## ■ Opportunities

- ◆ *The Coral Executive Order encourages US CRTF members to use their authorities to the maximum extent to protect reefs.*
- ◆ *The Coral Reef Conservation Act contains an 'Emergency Assistance' provision.*

# Response to Resolution III

## New legislation for coral reef damage assessment

### ■ Response

- ◆ *New NRDA legislation would face the same challenges.*
- ◆ *OPA '90-based NRDA protocols already exist*

### ■ Opportunities

- ◆ *Develop, adapt, and/or transfer existing protocols.*
- ◆ *local decision making and flexibility in restoration*
- ◆ *Develop local economic values for coral reef resources*





# Response to Resolution IV

## Federal assistance protocols to assist U.S. Flag Islands

### ■ Response

- ◆ *Response to this action does not require significant political support.*
- ◆ *Work can be accomplished through existing partnerships.*
- ◆ *Existing funds can be used to develop projects and provide training.*

### ■ Opportunities

- ◆ *Maximize networks and/or further develop working relationships through the area committees.*
- ◆ *Increase education and prevention*
  - *reef markers, Raycon beacons, etc.*



# Accomplishments

- USCG removal of 10 sunken vessels in Guam after typhoon Chata'an and removal of derelict vessels in Puerto Rico.
- NOAA Abandoned Vessel Inventory and ground surveys in the Caribbean.
- NOAA and CNMI partnership and funding to assess and remove abandoned vessels.
- American Samoa developing local vessel grounding legislation.
- CNMI Coral Reef initiative to fund storm-preventative grounding measures.



# Next Steps for Initiative

## Existing Abandoned Vessels

- NOAA, DOJ and USCG to work with Islands to identify priority abandoned vessels, assess legality of removal, and identify potential sources of funding to plan and remove.
- NOAA, U.S. Coast Guard, and Islands to complete and ground truth Abandoned Vessel Database.



# Next Steps for Initiative

## Future Vessels that Ground

- Hold vessel grounding meetings in U.S. Caribbean Islands.
- Federal working group to complete white paper analysis, focusing on existing authorities and funding sources.
- All Islands, with technical assistance from NOAA, DOJ, and USCG, to pursue development of local legislation to allow for abandoned vessel removal.
- Island and Federal agencies to pursue maximizing networks and common protocols for response to vessel grounding incidents.
- Island and Federal agencies to investigate local mechanisms to help prevent future groundings.

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# Additional Information

## Abandoned Vessel Inventory and Vessel Grounding Workshop Proceedings



[http://response.restoration.noaa.gov  
/dac/vessels/documents](http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/dac/vessels/documents)